

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ACCRA 2252

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PGOV, SHUM, GH

SUBJ: CHURCHMEN CALL FOR OPEN AND HONEST REFERENDUM

1. SUMMARY: CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT CHURCH LEADERS HAVE SUBMITTED A MEMORANDUM TO HEAD OF STATE ACHEAMPONG URGING HIM TO PERMIT A FAIR REFERENDUM ON UNION GOVERNMENT. IN ADDITION, LETTERS READ TO FAITHFUL AT SUNDAY SERVICES CONTAIN THINLY-VEILED ATTACKS ON REGIME. CHURCHES ARE THUS MOVING INTO MORE OPEN OPPOSITION TO ACHEAMPONG, WHICH INCREASES LIKELIHOOD UNION GOVERNMENT MIGHT WELL BE DEFEATED IN AN HONEST REFERENDUM. END SUMMARY.

2. SPOKESMEN OF NATIONAL CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT AND CHRISTIAN COUNCIL OF GHANA (LATTER REPRESENTING ALL MAJOR PROTESTANT CHURCHES HERE) MET WITH ACHEAMPONG ON MARCH 15 TO PRESENT A METCANDUM ON MARCH 30 REFERENDUM. IN THIS DOCUMENT, CHURCHMEN STRONGLY PROTEST NUMEROUS POLITICAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY ACHEAMPONG REGIME -- E.G., ARREST LAST MONTH OF NATIONAL SECRETARY OF GHANA BAR ASSOCIATION, THUG ATTACKS ON HEADMASTER OF SECONDARY SCHOOL IN KUMASI, DENIAL OF FREE SPEECH TO OPPOSITION GROUPS, AND ONE-SIDEDNESS OF GOVERNMENT'S CAMPAIGN FOR REFEREENDUM (PERMITS FOR RALLIES ARE GIVEN ONLY TO PRO-UNION GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS.) MEMORANDUM CONCLUDES BY ASKING GOVERNMENT TO ALLOW PEOPLE TO SPEAK AGAINST

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UNION GOVERNMENT WITHOUT HARASSMENT, TO USE RESTRAINT IN DEALING WITH STUDENT PROTESTS, AND TO PERMIT MEDIA TO GIVE IMPARTIAL COVERAGE TO BOTH PRO- AND ANTI-UNION GOVERNMENT VIEWS. DOCUMENT IS SIGNED BY D. K. ANDOH, PRESIDENT, CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE: C.K. DOVLO, CHAIRMAN, CHRISTIAN COUNCIL OF GHANA; H. SENOO, SECRETARY-GENERAL, NATIONAL CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT; AND C.A. ANSA, GENERAL SECRETARY, CHRISTIAN

COUNCIL OF GHANA.

3. WE UNDERSTAND IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR CLERICS TO ARRANGE A MEETING WITH ACHEAMPONG. WHEN IT WAS FINALLY HELD, IT DID NOT GO WELL. ACHEAMPONG REFUSED TO LISTEN TO THEIR CASE AND CLAIMED THAT OPPOSITION TO HIS GOVERNMENT IS "SUPPORTED BY FOREIGN POWERS." ON LATTER POINT, HE CLAIMED TO HAVE ACCESS TO SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON ALLEGED FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT, WHICH HE SAID CHURCHMEN HAD NOT SEEN.

4. BEFORE MEETING WITH ACHEAMPONG, CHURCH LEADERS APPROVED MESSAGES TO BE READ IN CHURCHES ON MARCH 12 AND 19. MARCH 12 MESSAGE, SIGNED BY DRAFTERS OF ABOVE MEMORANDUM AND PRINTED IN WEEKLY CATHOLIC STANDARD, APPEALS TO CONGREGATIONS TO REFRAIN FROM ACTS OF VIOLENCE JCD REMINDS THEM THEY HAVE A DUTY TO LISTEN TO VIEWS THAT DIFFER FROM THEIR OWN. MARCH 19 PASTORAL LETTER, SIGNED BY GHANA'S TWO CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOPS AND SEVEN BISHOPS, BEGINS BY STATING THAT PEOPLE SHOULD BE FREE TO DISCUSS OPENLY AND FRANKLY THE IDEA OF UNION GOVERNMENT. IT DRAWS A STRONG DISTINCTION BETWEEN A NON-PARTY GOVERNMENT AND A NON-PARTY STATE: FORMER MAY BE PRACTICABLE AND EVEN COMMENDABLE, BUT LATTER "EITHER IS AN IMPOSSIBILITY OR WOULD BE A DISGUISED ONE-PARTY STATE OR PLAIN DICTATORSHIP." ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS GO ON TO EXPRESS "SORROW AT SEEING THAT OUR POLITICAL LIFE HAS RECENTLY BEEN MARRED BY ACTS OF TUGGERY" AND CONDEMN EXCESSES BY BOTH STUDENTS
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(WHO KIDNAPPED A POLICEMAN DURING JANUARY DISTURBANCES AT UNIVERSITY OF GHANA) AND BY POLICE (WHO STRIPPED AND MIS-TREATED A WOMAN TEACHER DURING SAME CLASHES). LETTER PLEADS WITH THOSE WHO CONTROL MEDIA TO DESIST FROM SO PATENTLY SUPPORTING UNION GOVERNMENT AND CALLS FOR MEDIA TO BECOME "A JUST AND FAIR FORUM FOR FREE PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THE VARIOUS ISSUES INVOLVED IN THE DEBATE." LETTER THEN CONCLUDES BY URGING FAITHFUL TO VOTE IN REFERENDUM, ONE WAY OR THE OTHER, BUT REMINDS THEM "A CHRISTIAN IS BOUND TO ACT IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS RIGHTLY FORMED CONSCIENCE" -- AN EXHORTATION WHICH, GIVEN OVERALL TONE OF LETTER, SEEMS TANTAMOUNT TO RECOMMENDING A "NO" VOTE ON UNION GOVERNMENT.

5. COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST TIME MAJOR FAITHS IN GHANA HAVE INVOLVED THEMSELVES FORMALLY IN DEBATE ON UNION GOVERNMENT AND MARCH 30 REFERENDUM. THRUST OF CHURCHMENS' VIEWS IS CLEARLY AGAINST UNION GOVERNMENT EVEN THOUGH THEY

HAVE STOPPED SHORT OF COMMITTING THEMSELVES PUBLICLY TO THE ANTI-UNION GOVERNMENT CAMP. HOWEVER, GHANA IS A CHURCH-GOING COUNTRY AND TEACHINGS OF CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT LEADERS WILL GET A REVERENTIAL HEARING. CHURCHES PROBABLY CANNOT ACTUALLY

DELIVER A BLOC OF "NO" VOTES BUT THEIR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN
CAMPAIGN MUST CONTRIBUTE TO THE STRENGTH OF ANTIA
ACHEAMPONG FORCES. IT IFDO#A FURTHER SIGN THAT, GIVEN AN OPEN
AND HONEST REFERENDUM, UNION GOVERNMENT MIGHT WELL BE DEFEATED.
SMITH

NOTE BY OC/T: # AS RECEIVED.

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